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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001633

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SUBJECT: AUTHORITIES ATTEMPT TO BLOCK ASSK IN RAKHINE STATE

Classified By: COM CARMEN M. MARTINEZ FOR REASON 1.5(D).

1. (C) Summary: Authorities have attempted to block citizens from greeting Aung San Suu Kyi over the last four days as she toured Rakhine State in western Burma. ASSK has commended those who have turned out for their bravery and scolded authorities for threatening instead of serving the people. The orders to interfere with the visit appear to have come from the USDA (under Senior General Than Shwe) while military intelligence (under Secretary One Khin Nyunt) claims to have no role in these activities. This appears to be an indication of potentially significant differences within the regime on how best to manage ASSK's growing public support. The remaining five days of the trip may give an idea of which approach will hold sway. End Summary.

2. (U) NLD Secretary U Lwin told Poloff that authorities have taken actions over the last four days to block citizens from turning out to see Aung San Suu Kyi as she tours Rakhine State in western Burma. He said citizens were warned to not show any support for ASSK when she passed through their towns, and fire brigade, police, and Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) members turned out to discourage anyone who defied the warnings. (Note: The USDA is a mass organization under the regime's control. End Note) Still, according to U Lwin, the people did turn out, in crowds ranging from an estimated 10,000 to 50,000 people, surprising even the NLD in their determination to see ASSK. When authorities reacted with riot police and fire trucks, ASSK intervened, leaving her vehicle, climbing atop a fire truck, and angrily chiding the authorities for threatening the people they were supposed to be serving. She commended the people for their bravery in exercising their rights to come and listen to her, saying that she continues to work with the government and the people for positive change in the country.

3. (C) U Lwin said he provided the above information to press reporters on December 19 at the request of ASSK, who was becoming frustrated with the continued harassment by authorities. He said he had received daily updates from ASSK on the three previous days on efforts to block her visit and had transmitted these concerns to Military Intelligence in Rangoon to no avail. On the fourth day, when yet another incident occurred, ASSK said it was time for U Lwin to make the harassment known to the press. She also asked that he convey to Military Intelligence reports that USDA Central Executive Committee Member (and Minister for Post and Telecommunications, and Hotels and Tourism) Thein Zaw had come to Rakhine State just prior to her visit and given instructions that citizens were not to show any support for ASSK. Interestingly, when U Lwin told Brigadier General Than Tun, MI's interlocutor with the NLD, about the planned press conference and Thein Zaw's activities, Than Tun responded that MI was doing all it could to facilitate ASSK's travels, that he did know or have control over what Thein Zaw was doing, and that U Lwin should go ahead with the press conference. U Lwin said he intentionally chose not to mention Thein Zaw by name to the press but that they know that the USDA is playing a leading role in obstructing the visit.

4. U Lwin attested that MI has been very responsive to the NLD's requests for support during ASSK's travel. He noted that they have held roads open for her late at night and waived document checks at normal checkpoints. He said that Thein Zaw's actions to prevent citizens from seeing ASSK appear to be coming from the USDA hierarchy, which ultimately leads to the Patron of the organization, Senior General Than Shwe. While U Lwin did not want to speculate on the significance of MI's effort to distance itself from USDA's actions in Rakhine State, he did acknowledge that it appeared to represent a split in how different elements of the SPDC are reacting to ASSK's travel.

5. We spoke to three NLD Members of Parliament-elect from Mandalay Division about this incident; all thought it was extremely positive as it highlighted ASSK's determination to stand up to repressive measures. They added that her admonition to local authorities not to thwart democracy and the peoples' will would resonate well with many public sector employees. When we asked about potential fallout from the

SPDC, they opined (perhaps naively) that ASSK cannot now be detained or fettered without risking a major reaction. One of the MPs-elect said the NLD's statements citing overzealous local authorities as the cause of the problem might give the SPDC a way to play down the incident, should they choose to do so.

16. Comment: Tens of thousands of people in an "ethnic" state reportedly cheering on ASSK as she faced down security authorities cannot be a comforting image to the generals in Rangoon. The apparent lack of communication and coordination between the USDA hierarchy (under Senior General Than Shwe) and the MI hierarchy (under Secretary One Khin Nyunt) may be a telling indicator of differing strategies for dealing with ASSK and her popular appeal. As the rest of the trip plays out (she is expected to be on the road for about 5 more days) we may get a better idea of whether these differences are fundamental or superficial. End Comment.
Martinez